

as significant for us in the economic and national security area as is automobile gasoline, 60 percent of which is imported. That is why I think when it comes to choices, we need to emphasize automobile fuels and what we can do to reduce our dependence and improve efficiencies.

I have been pleased to serve with Chairman BINGAMAN on the Energy Committee. I just joined that committee. He is a man of intelligence and decency and commitment to doing right. We have had quite a number of hearings. We have not gone into this issue lightly. I am, however, reluctantly compelled to oppose his renewable portfolio standard amendment and would like to share a few thoughts about it.

First, the overall estimate is that in areas of the country that do not have the natural conditions that allow us to expand renewable energy sources there will be huge costs that will be borne. It seems that some like to suggest those costs will fall on the utilities. Nobody likes utilities because they send us a bill every month. We tend to forget they send us electricity every month also. But they send us a bill every month, and if we don't pay it, they will shut off our electricity. It is not a very pleasant thing to hear from your utility. But utilities throughout America are regulated utilities. What they charge has to be approved by public service commissions or commissions of a like nature.

We have a public service commission in Alabama. Those public service commissions monitor their profits and monitor their charges for electricity and disapprove many times requests for rate increases.

There is a principle that each and every one of our Senators need not forget; and that is, if areas that don't have the capacity to generate electricity with renewables have to pay the penalties and have to pay for other ways to get electricity, that cost, which some have estimated to be \$100 billion to \$200 billion annually, is the equivalent of this Congress taxing the people in those areas of the country \$100 billion to \$200 billion and directing it to be spent in this fashion whether or not it is the best way to protect our environment.

In an economic sense and in a true sense, we are saying we are not going to tax the people in the country to fund these programs. We are just going to pass a mandate, and we are going to mandate it on these businesses. And if they cannot meet it, then we are going to require them to pay a penalty. We didn't tax them, we are not taxing anybody, and we are going on about our business and we are going to move us to a more renewable portfolio—a good goal, you see.

But if you step back and look at this, it is the equivalent of taxing the people hundreds of billions of dollars, and that tax will be passed on to consumers of electricity. Already their gasoline

prices have gone up dramatically, and now we are seeing some rise in electricity rates, and this is going to be passed on. There is no free lunch. It will be passed on, and the people to whom it is going to be passed on to the most are the people in my State because our wind resources will not work.

Wind in some areas of this country will work. It really will. It can be virtually competitive with other sources of electricity, and that is nice; although in areas that are fairly congested with people, people don't like all these wind turbines. But out West, in some areas, I assume there is still potential to expand wind, and I am for that. I just don't like to see us require wind turbines where it is not going to work, or solar panels where it won't work.

In my home State of Alabama, one would think we have a good bit of sunshine, but in truth, we have a lot of clouds, and solar is not effective in our area. It is not effective anywhere really. It is much more expensive than any other form of generating electricity and least effective in the Northeast. Even in the Southeast, because of our thunderstorms and our long periods in which we have cloudy weather, it is an unpredictable source of electricity, and it is very expensive anyway. It will be a great expense.

I share with my colleagues a letter from the Southeastern Association of Regulatory Utility Commissions. These are the people who, for the most part, are elected by their constituents. They represent the States of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Tennessee. They are very much opposed to this amendment, not because they are not for renewables, not because they want to defend some utility, but because they know if this amendment is adopted, rates are going to go up on their constituents and with nothing to show for it.

This is their May 31 letter, just a few weeks ago, to the leadership in this body and the House. They say:

... to express our concerns about the nationwide, mandatory federal renewable portfolio standard being discussed/introduced by Senator BINGAMAN. As state regulators, we are responsible for ensuring that retail electricity consumers receive affordable, reliable electric service. We are concerned that a uniform, federal RPS mandate fails to recognize adequately that there are significant differences among the states in terms of available and cost-effective renewable energy resources and that having such a standard in energy legislation will ultimately increase consumers' electricity bills.

Then they go on to note, quote:

The reality is that not all States are fortunate enough to have abundant traditional renewable energy resources, such as wind, or have them located close enough to the load to render them cost effective. This is especially true in the southeast and large parts of the Midwest.

They go on to say, quote:

Our retail electricity customers will end up paying higher electricity prices, with nothing to show for it.

With nothing to show for it.

So the letter goes on, and they say, quote:

While State public service commissions and energy service providers should certainly consider available and cost-effective renewable energy resource options as they make long-term decisions for incremental energy needs, the imposition of a strict Federal RPS mandate, as contrasted with a State-driven cost-effectiveness determination, will only result in higher electric prices for our consumers.

So that is the fundamental concern.

The goal of how we can go about this is complicated. I think we can make progress toward more renewable energy sources, but I don't see how we can omit nuclear power as a major player in this as the source of tremendous amounts of electricity with no adverse emissions into the atmosphere. How we could be ignoring that is difficult for me to understand, I would say to my colleagues.

My goal is pretty simple, in how I analyze legislation. First, I believe we ought to consider our national security. How does it help us remain independent? Does it impact our economy adversely? A healthy, growing economy is good for this country. I certainly think we should not and must not have a goal of raising energy costs, whether it is gasoline at the pump or electricity on the monthly bill. Raising those prices cannot be our goal. It can only make us less competitive in this competitive global marketplace.

Our goal cannot be to raise prices, but I will tell you that it is a secret, unstated goal of many of the people who are driving some of this legislation. They think if they can drive up the price of gasoline, if they can drive up the price of electricity, the average person won't use so much of it because they do not have enough money to pay for it.

Well, that is not good. Our goal as a nation should be to have safe, clean, reliable energy available at a cost as low as possible as part of living a healthy, productive life. Electricity in nations that have it readily available compared to countries where it is not available have twice the lifespan. You have twice the lifespan if electricity is readily available in your country as you do if you don't. It is a tragedy to see countries struggle so badly. So it is a blessing for us. Energy is not something bad. It is a fabulous blessing to our Nation to have it as readily available as we do, and we need to keep that cost down.

The proposal requires all distribution utilities that sell more than 4 million megawatt hours a year to meet targeted levels beginning in 2010. The RPS standard in this amendment requires each such utility to have 15 percent of its load in renewables, and renewables are only solar, wind, geothermal—there is no geothermal out East, either; there is no ocean capability in our area of the country—biomass—some small possibility but nothing like this area—